



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
**JOSEPH A. CURTATONE**  
**MAYOR**

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION*

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**DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE STAFF REPORT**

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Site: 53 Kent Street  
Case: HPC 2013.048  
Applicant Name: Kent Street Partners LLC  
  
Date of Application: July 31, 2013  
Recommendation: Significant  
Hearing Date: August 20, 2013

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**I. Historical Association**

*Architectural*

*Description:* The subject structure, c.1850, is a 1½ story gable-end dwelling with a rear ell in the Greek Revival style. In addition, a very small lean-to addition (c.1934) is located on the left side façade where the rear ell attaches to the main massing. A brick foundation is visible on both sides of the main structure while the foundation of the rear ell is parged. As several windows have six-over-six glass panes with thin mullions and storm windows, these have the potential to be original to the structure. The house is entirely clad in shake



*53 Kent Street, primary façade ( photo 2013)*

shingles, which would originally have been wooden clapboards.

*53 Kent Street, rear façade of ell (photo 2013)*

The front, or primary façade, features an enclosed front porch with a short eave return and a wide trim band beneath, creating a frieze. This band of trim extends the length of the left and right sides of the house, emphasizing the cornice line. Within the entry porch, the façade retains one window and a right side-hall entry with an overhead transom. The rear ell also has a short cornice return, though this return extends further than those on the main massing. In addition, the rear ell steps down, slightly below grade, and each façade has one window. The only remaining chimney is also located at the rear of this ell. Windows of the main massing are located in the half-story, beneath the gable on either end of the structure. There are two windows located on the left side (Beacon Street) of the structure while one window is located on the right side. Two basement windows are also located along the Beacon Street façade. A small unenclosed structure for storage is also located on this parcel, to the right of the dwelling.



*Historical Description:* The subject property is clearly illustrated on the 1852 Draper map (see below) and Nicholas Flemmin, a laborer, is listed as living on Beacon Street in the 1851 directory. However, earlier Charlestown directories do not list a Nicholas Flemmin or Flemming. The 1858 Walling map continues to illustrate a structure at this location. The 1869-70 directory lists both Nicholas and David Flemming as laborers at the Bleachery who reside on the corner of Kent and Beacon streets.



*1852 Draper map with 53 Kent Street circled in red*

The 1874 (Plate J) and the 1884 (Plate 9) Hopkins maps list N. Flemming (aka Flemmin) as the property owner as well as the lot behind the subject property, along Beacon Street. However, the 1874 map does not illustrate the rear ell. The 1875-76 directory additionally lists Timothy Flemming, a laborer, as a resident of this address. The 1885 directory continues to list Nicholas, David, and Timothy; however, Nicholas is identified as an engineer at the Bleachery with a house

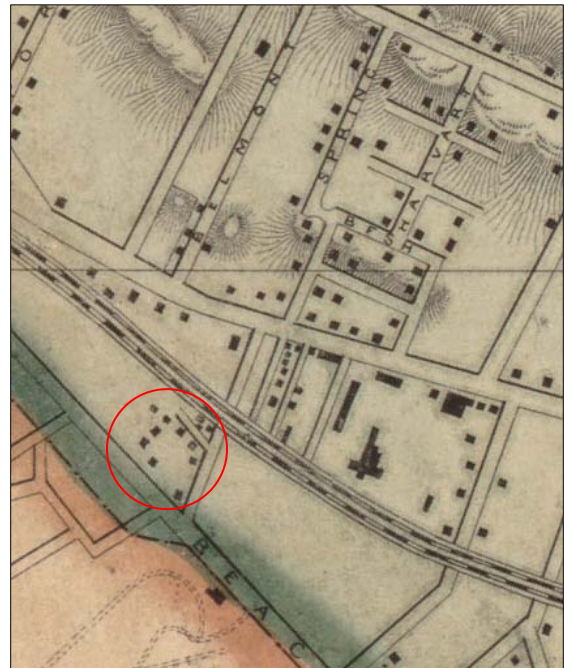
at 247 Beacon and David is identified as a “calenderer.” By 1890, George Cox is also listed as a resident. The Bromley Atlas from 1895 (Plate 4) illustrates these parcels (13,050 square feet) as owned by Anna Flemming and the Durell School is now located across Kent Street.

The 1900 Sanborn map (Sheet 38) illustrates the structure more clearly as a 1½ story building while the rear ell is only one story. George (and Annie E.) Cox is listed as the resident, a bookkeeper at this time. The 1915 directory additionally lists Gertrude, a clerk, and Grace Cox as boarders at this residence. The 1925 directory additionally lists George T. Jr., a salesman, as a resident. By 1934, the Sanborn map (Vol. II, Sheet 264) notes that the corner parcel is separate from the rear parcel along Beacon Street where a filling station is located. The updated Sanborn map (1934-1950) does not illustrate any changes. The Cox family continues to reside here through the 1940s; however, in 1945, Gertrude Cox as well as Loretta and Grace West are listed as occupants. George T. is not listed after 1940, but the most recent deed identifies this as the estate of Loretta G. West.

#### *Context/Evolution:*

Kent Street connected Beacon Street with Somerville Avenue, then Milk Row, as early as 1813, according to *Beyond the Neck*. In 1835, the first passenger railroad station in Somerville opened and in 1842, the Kent Street Station opened near the Harvard Branch railway spur, which encouraged the development of the southern slope of Spring Hill. Nearby, Kent Court became located near the Fitchburg Railroad tracks after the Civil War.

According to the 1858 Walling map, a small collection of mid nineteenth century structures along this portion of Kent Street and Kent Court appears to remain existent. Being located near the Bleachery, these dwellings likely would have housed employees of the Bleachery and later industries that located in the immediate area or the railroad. 45 Kent Street, a two-family, is identified as c.1830-1840 by the short eaves and windows. Another dwelling located at 6 Kent Court is identified in a Form B to have been constructed c.1750 and moved to its present location from Somerville Avenue. This structure has a gambrel roof, a five-bay façade that is one room deep and a rear lean-to. Additionally, several other dwellings located along Kent Court appear similar to the workers cottages located near the brickyards. Several are three bays wide and one room deep with high brick foundations, which were useful for cooking or for use as a shop. This type of structure was small, inexpensive, easy to construct and often used in marshy areas where excavating a cellar was not practical.



1858 Walling map with Kent Street and Kent Court circled in red

#### *Summary:*

The subject structure, c.1850, is a 1½ story gable-end dwelling in the Greek Revival style. There are a number of remaining architectural features, such as the cornice return and entablature frieze

for both the main massing and the rear ell, six-over-six window sashes with mullions, and a front entry transom. In addition, a small collection of mid nineteenth century structures along this portion of Kent Street and Kent Court appears to remain existent and to retain, at minimum, a moderate degree of historical significance and architectural integrity. While the subject dwelling is located slightly beyond the nineteenth century historical context that is more clearly presented on Kent Court, the structure located at 45 Beacon Street continues this context, linking Kent Street with Kent Court. In addition, the subject dwelling is associated with the Middlesex Bleachery as Nicholas, David and Timothy Flemming are identified in multiple directories as employees.

### **Findings on Historical Association**

*For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either (a) **importantly associated with people, events or history** or (b) historically or architecturally significant (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B). Findings for (b) are at the end of the next section.*

(a) In accordance with the historic information obtained from *Findings on Historical Association*, which utilizes historic maps/atlasses, City reports and directories, and building permit research, and through an examination of resources that document the history of the City, such as *Somerville Past and Present*, Staff find 53 Kent Street to be importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth.

The subject building is found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to the retention of several architectural details that continue to illustrate the Greek Revival style, as an example of working class housing specifically associated with the Middlesex Bleachery, and as part of an early to mid nineteenth century collection of housing associated with the early development and industry of Somerville.

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## **II. Historical and Architectural Significance**

*The findings for historical and/or architectural significance of a historic property address the period, style, method of building construction and association with a reputed architect or builder of the subject property, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B).*

The period of significance for 53 Kent Street begins with the c.1850 date of construction as a modest single-family dwelling in the Greek Revival style and continues into the present day as the use of this structure remains consistent.

### ***Integrity***

*The National Park Service identifies historic integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance. A property should possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent or contain the values and qualities for which it is judged significant; therefore, the following is an identification and evaluation of these qualities and alterations as they affect the ability of the subject property to convey significance.*

- a. **Location:** The subject structure is located along Kent Street south of Wilson Square, near Cambridge. The location has not been altered and the dwelling is sited within the center



of the lot. The location of this historic structure, as well as others along Kent Street, which are adjacent to the historic structures along Kent Court, illustrate an early to mid nineteenth century collection of housing associated with the early development and industry of Somerville.



*Kent Court streetscape, photo 2013*

- b. *Design:* The original form, massing, and fenestration pattern are still evident as well as the rear ell. There are number of remaining architectural features, such as the six-over-six windows with mullions, overhead door transom and entablature frieze. While doors have been replaced, and shake shingles cover the exterior structure, the original design features and fenestration pattern are clear.
- c. *Materials:* The materials that compose this structure are predominantly wood, with a brick foundation, while asphalt shingles were added to the roof at a later period.
- d. *Alterations:* The rear ell appears to have been constructed c.1884. Aside from a very small lean-to addition (c.1934), located on the left side façade where the rear ell attaches to the main massing, this structure does not appear to have had alterations. While the porch is likely a later addition, the date of this addition is not illustrated through historic map research.

*Evaluation of Integrity:*

The subject structure retains a high level of historical and architectural integrity due to the retention of original materials as well minimal alterations. In addition, this structure is part of a small collection of mid nineteenth century working class housing the represents the early development and industry of Somerville and is associated with the Middlesex Bleachery.

### **Findings for Historical and Architectural Significance**

*For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either (a) importantly associated with people, events or history or (b) **historically or architecturally significant** (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B). Findings for (a) can be found at the end of the previous section.*

**(b)** In accordance with the *Finding on Historical and Architectural Significance*, which addresses period, style, method of building construction, and association with a reputed architect

or builder, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures, as well as integrity, which assess the ability of the property to convey significance, Staff find 53 Kent Street historically or architecturally significant.

The subject dwelling is found historically and architecturally significant as a representative of mid 19<sup>th</sup> century working class housing stock due to the remaining integrity of the structure with regard to original form, massing, fenestration pattern, and material. In addition, due to the location of the structure within such close proximity to a small collection of structures that represent the same cultural context, this dwelling is significant within the context of the group of buildings which, together, represent the early development and industry of Somerville.

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### III. Recommendation

*Recommendations are based upon an analysis by Historic Preservation Staff of the permit application and the required findings for the Demolition Review Ordinance, which requires archival and historical research, and an assessment of historical and architectural significance, conducted prior to the public meeting for a Determination of Significance. This report may be revised or updated with a new recommendation and/or findings based upon additional information provided to Staff or through further research.*

*For a Determination of Significance, the structure must be either (A) listed on the National Register or (B) at least 50 years old.*

(A) The structure is NOT listed on or within an area listed on the National Register of Historic Places, nor is the structure the subject of a pending application for listing on the National Register.

OR

(B) The structure, c. 1850, is at least 50 years old.

AND

*For a Determination of Significance under (B), the subject building must be found either (a) importantly associated with people, events or history or (b) historically or architecturally significant.*

(a) In accordance with the *Findings on Historical Association*, which utilizes historic maps/atlasses, City reports and directories, and building permit research, and through an examination of resources that document the history of the City, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 53 Kent Street importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth.**

OR

(b) In accordance with the *Findings on Historical and Architectural Significance*, which addresses period, style, method of building construction, and association with a reputed architect or builder, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures, as well as integrity, the ability to convey significance, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 53 Kent Street historically or architecturally significant.**

53 Kent Street

